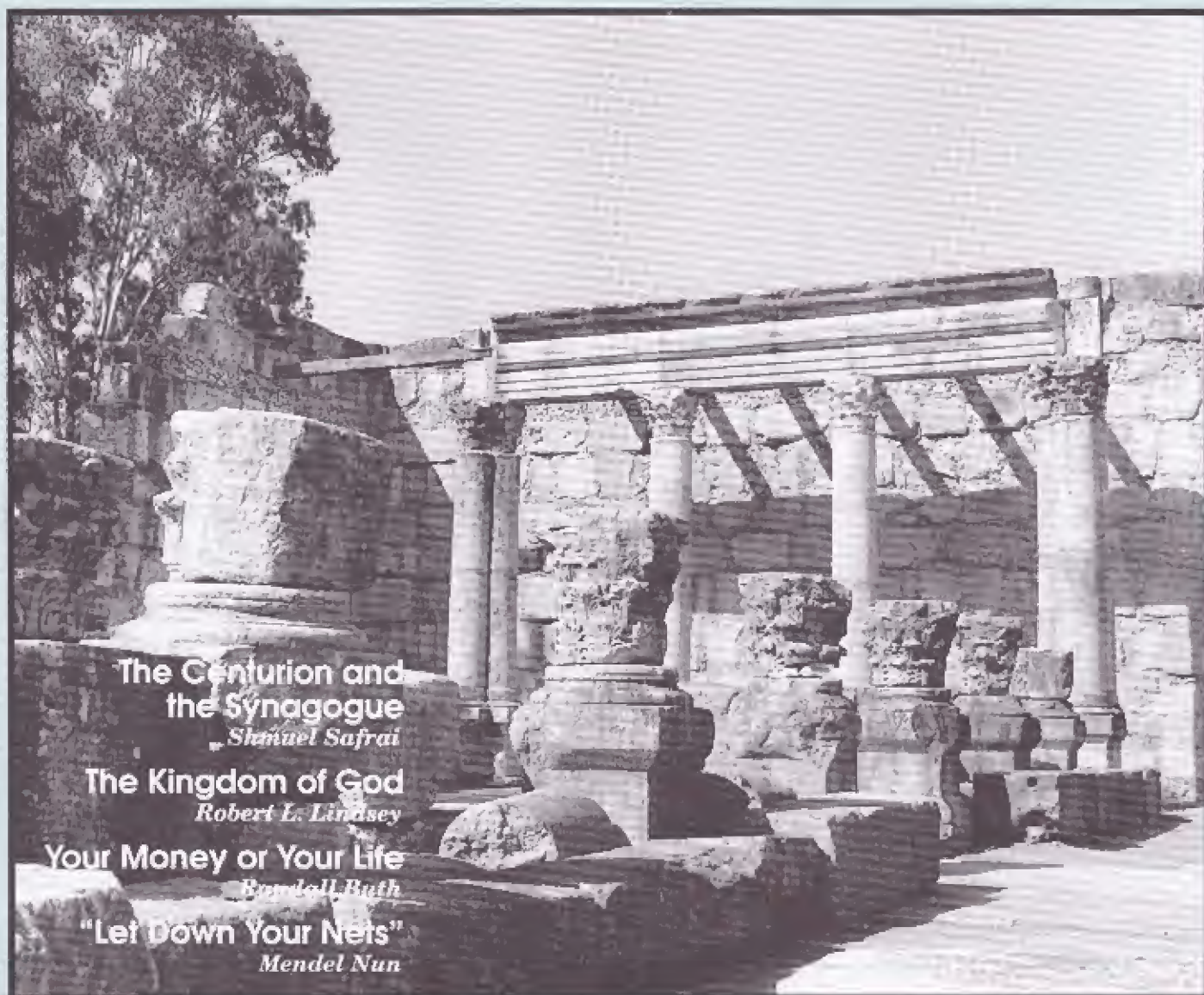


מנקודת ראות ירושלמית

Jerusalem Perspective

January/February 1990
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The Centurion and
the Synagogue

Shmuel Safrai

The Kingdom of God

Robert L. Lindsey

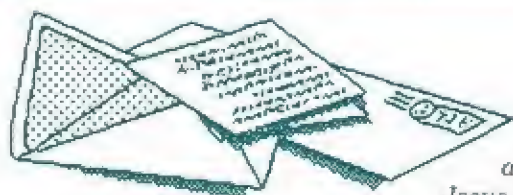
Your Money or Your Life

Barclay B. Rath

"Let Down Your Nets"

Mendel Nun

A Bimonthly Report on Research into the Words of Jesus



Lately I have read about the work of the Jesus Seminar here in the United States. Apparently these scholars are voting to decide which of the sayings of Jesus are really his own. What is your reaction to what they are doing?

— A reader in Los Angeles, California, U.S.A.

The scholars of the Jesus Seminar are strongly influenced by the theory of dissimilarity. As propounded by Norman Perrin (*The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus*, Westminster Press, 1963; *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*, Harper & Row, 1967) and others, this theory states that in general only those portions of the Gospels that have no parallels in ancient literature are authentic. The assumption is that anything which has a parallel must have been copied and wrongly attributed to Jesus.

Because the Jesus Seminar scholars have presumed that the only true words of Jesus are those devoid of any Hebraic reference, they have failed to consider important rabbinic parallels, and have also found themselves obliged to excise a great deal of Jesus' teaching. They have already voted on many of Jesus' sayings, and almost every saying that reflects a verse from Hebrew

Scripture has been rejected. Thus, "Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth" (Mt. 5:5) has been excluded because it echoes Psalm 37:11, and "Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God" (Mt. 5:8) has been eliminated because the scholars believe it is based on Psalm 24:3-4. Recently most of the Lord's Prayer has been rejected because of its rabbinic phraseology.

Evidence from the Gospels and other literature of the period clearly shows that Jesus was very much rooted in first-century Judaism and, like all such sages, drew heavily on Scripture. Jesus was a typical Jewish sage in every way but one: he claimed to be the Messiah. Yet even this special claim was made in very rabbinic ways, with subtle allusions to biblical prophecies that might easily be missed by those not versed in rabbinic teachings.

Many New Testament scholars fail to recognize the importance of the Hebraic background to Jesus' words. But it seems especially unfortunate that the Jesus Seminar purposely rejects the validity of any Gospel saying that contains scriptural or rabbinic parallels.

— David Bivin

The New Testament mentions individuals who belonged to this or that tribe. Did

(continued on page 14)

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*Cover photo:
Remains of the
third-century A.D.
synagogue of
Capernaum, con-
structed over the
ruins of the first-
century synagogue
frequented by Jesus.
(Courtesy of the Israel
Government Press Office)*

The Centurion and the Synagogue

A Roman centurion's concern for his slave focuses our attention on the presence of non-Jews in the land of Israel in the first century. A modern Jewish authority on the history of the period provides the story's background.

by Shmuel Safrai

When Jesus had finished saying all these things to the people, he entered Capernaum. There a centurion's slave, whom his master valued highly, was sick and near death. The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some Jewish elders to ask him to come and heal his slave. When they came to Jesus they begged him earnestly, "He deserves this favor from you. He loves our people and he himself has built a synagogue for us." So Jesus went with them. (Lk. 7:1-6)

This story about Jesus and a centurion poses a historical and halachic question: How is it possible that a non-Jew, and an officer in the Roman army no less, would build a synagogue for Jews in the land of Israel?

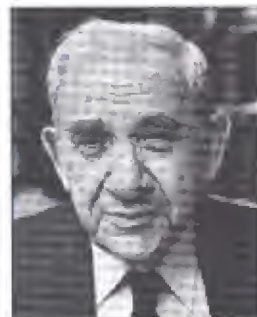
Non-Jews

Isaiah 56:7 states: "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." This prophecy was reflected in the everyday life of the Second Temple period, especially in the first century C.E. Gentiles came to the Temple in Jerusalem to worship the LORD, and many also were found in the synagogues of the land of Israel and the diaspora.

Finding Gentiles in synagogues as described in the book of Acts (13:16, 14:1, 17:4, 17:17, 18:4) is very much in keeping with the reality of the late Second Temple period and immediately afterwards, as numerous rabbinic sources also indicate.

Gentiles not only frequented the synagogue, but also contributed to it. The halachah allowed the acceptance from non-Jews of voluntary sacrifices and gifts for the Temple. Gifts for rebuilding the Temple had been accepted already in the biblical period from the pagan kings Cyrus and Artaxerxes (Ezra 6:4, Neh. 2:8). Only the annual half-shekel tax, which every Jewish male from the age of twenty paid to the Temple, was not accepted from non-Jews because it was considered obligatory and in Exodus 30:11-16 was associated with the census of the Children of Israel.

The halachah assumed that Gentiles would bring gifts to the synagogue as well. The Jerusalem Talmud, for example, relates that the Roman Emperor Antoninus (probably to be equated with Caracalla, 211-217 C.E.) donated a menorah to a synagogue. When Rabbi Yehudah ha-Nasi heard of this he said,

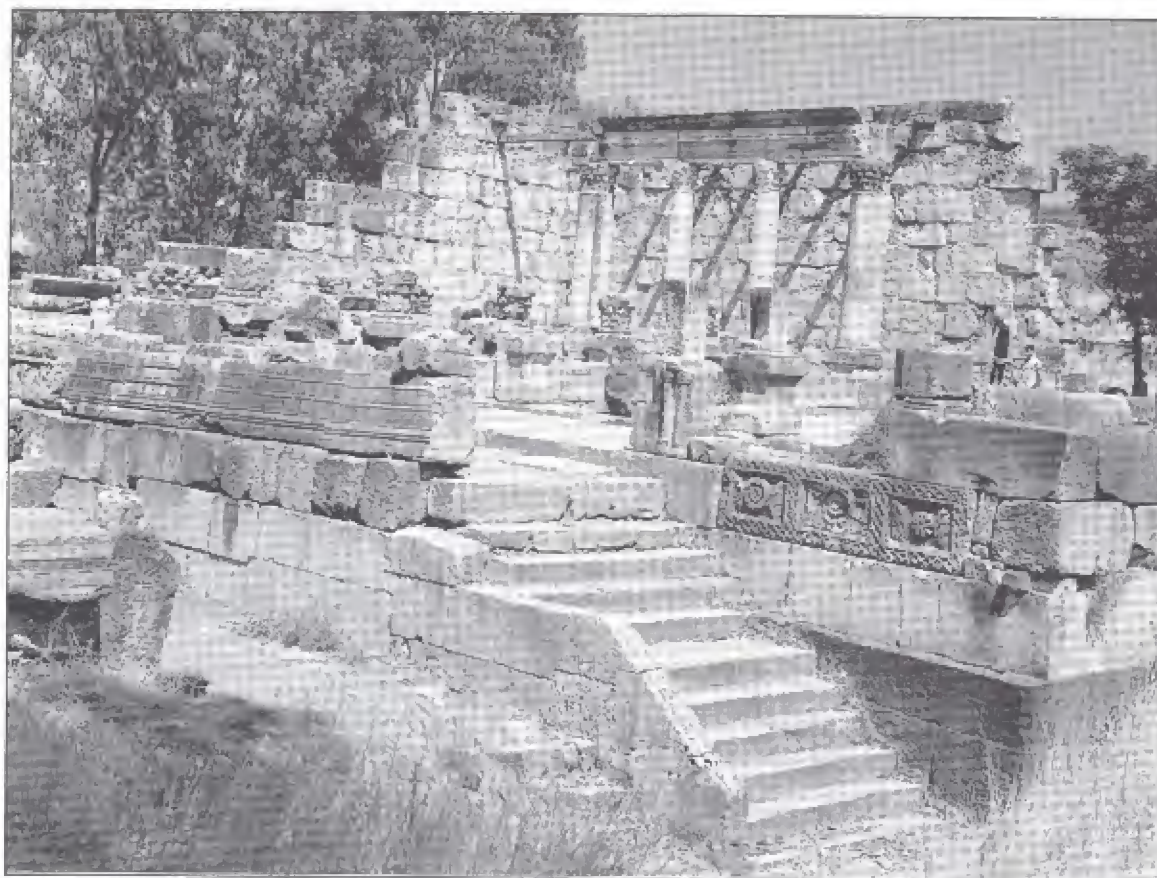


Shmuel Safrai, one of the senior members of the Jerusalem School, is professor of Jewish History of the Mishnaic and Talmudic Period at the Hebrew University.



A Roman centurion — from tombstone of Marcus Favonius Facilis of the 20th Legion stationed in Britain.

(Courtesy of Museo della Civiltà Romana, Rome)



Ruins of the third-century C.E. synagogue at Capernaum (כפר נחום, *ke-FAR na-HUM*, village of *Nahum*) on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. (Courtesy of the Israel Government Press Office)

"Blessed be God who gave him the idea to have a menorah made for the synagogue" (Megillah 74^a).

The sages discussed only one problematic aspect in this regard: the case of a non-Jew who donated an object to the synagogue that was inscribed with a dedication referring to God. There was some doubt whether the donor in this case had in mind the Creator of the universe or a pagan god: "A non-Jew who dedicated a beam to a synagogue on which was written a reference to God, is questioned. If he said, 'For sacred use I have dedicated it,' it is stored in the *genizah*. If he said, 'For the sake of the synagogue I have dedicated it,' the place where the reference to God was written is cut out and stored in the *genizah* and the rest of the beam is used" (Tosefta, Megillah 3:5).

A number of inscriptions found in Asia Minor mention contributions to synagogues from people referred to as "God-fearers," a term usually describing non-Jews who had abandoned outright paganism and adopted a Jewish outlook without actually converting to Judaism. Especially important is the first-century C.E. inscription from Akmonia in Phrygia in central Asia Minor. Discovered in a synagogue, the inscription states that the synagogue was built by Julia Sev-

era, a rather well-known woman in her city who apparently was not Jewish. She also is mentioned in several non-Jewish inscriptions found at Akmonia, and her name and the title "high priestess" appear on coins minted there in the days of the Roman Emperor Nero (54-68 C.E.) (B. Lifshitz, "Donateurs et Fondateurs dans les Synagogues Juives," Supplement to *Revue Biblique*, 7 [1967], no. 33, p. 34).

The Jewish community in

Akmonia was well established. The synagogue even had one of the few Hebrew inscriptions found in Asia Minor. The inscription reads: "Let there be peace on Israel and on Jerusalem and on this place until the end of days" (*Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiqua*, VI, no. 334).

Benevolent Roman

The Roman army in Palestine represented a rule of foreigners for whom most things Jewish, whether in terms of religion, society or nationhood, were strange indeed. The administrators at all levels generally were corrupt and saw their positions only as a means of increasing their personal wealth. The historical sources of the period, and especially Josephus, describe a reality of oppression and tell of numerous killings and executions. These resulted both from explicit policy as well as from the vast difference between the world of Judaism and the Roman-pagan world.

In addition to this, the Jewish people in the land of Israel developed a general opposition to the non-Jewish world surrounding them, which occasionally resulted in violence and revolt on various scales. However, in spite of the many violent encounters with the Roman army both in times of war and

peace, there were occasional instances of understanding and even friendship between Roman officers and Jews. There are a number of stories in rabbinic literature that illustrate this closeness. Some of these can be dated to the first century C.E., not far from the time when the centurion constructed the synagogue in Capernaum.

We read, for instance, in Tosefta Shabbat 13:9: "It once happened that a fire broke out [on the Sabbath] in the courtyard of Joseph ben Sammai in Asochis and the men in the army camp at Sepphoris came to put it out. But he would not let them, and a cloud came and extinguished the fire. The sages said: 'He need not have done that.' In spite of their not having put out the fire, at the conclusion of the Sabbath, he sent a sela to each of the soldiers and fifty dinars to their commanding officer."

The halachah states that it is forbidden for a Jew to ask a non-Jew to undertake labors on the Sabbath on his behalf. However, it is permitted for a non-Jew to carry out work that benefits a Jew if the non-Jew did so without being asked. In the above case, the soldiers came of their own volition from their camp at Sepphoris, about five kilometers south of Asochis, a town in Lower Galilee. Joseph ben Sammai, however, was especially stringent in his observance of the commandments and did not want them to violate the Sabbath on his account. Although they had not put out the fire, he generously rewarded their willingness to help by giving each of them a sum equal to four dinars.

A parallel to this story found in the Babylonian Talmud, Shabbath 121^a, states that Joseph ben Sammai was the *epitropos* or chief financial administrator of the king. It is likely that he served Agrippa II who ruled over Galilee as part of his domain during the last half of the first century and that he is the same *epitropos* of King Agrippa who once asked a legal point of Rabbi Eliezer (Babylonian Talmud, Sukkah 27^a).

There are other sources which mention Romans having friendly relations with Jewish

people in general. Mishnah, Bechorot 5:3, states: "It once happened that a *quaestor* saw an old ram with thinning hair and said, 'What is the meaning of this?' 'It is a first-born and it may not be slaughtered unless it contracts a blemish,' he was told. The *quaestor* took a dagger and slit its ear. The matter came before the sages and they ruled that the ram could be slaughtered. When he realized that the sages had allowed the animal to be slaughtered, he slit the ears of other firstlings, but the sages ruled that these could not be slaughtered."

According to biblical law, every male first-born of an animal permitted to be eaten was to be offered as a peace-offering (Num. 18:15-18). After the destruction of the Temple when sacrifices could no longer be offered, the first offsprings were kept until they developed some sort of blemish, making them theoretically unfit for the altar, and then they could be slaughtered and eaten. However, one could not inflict the blemish deliberately.

The story of the *quaestor* depicts a high-ranking Roman army officer who displayed a degree of feeling and understanding for Jews and their customs. It was obviously his affection for his Jewish neighbors that caused him to try to help them by blemishing the first-born rams.

In summary, therefore, it is quite conceivable that at the time of Jesus a Roman army officer might have had such warm feelings for the Jewish people and their religion as to construct a synagogue for the people of Capernaum. JP

Partially restored ruins of the third-fourth century C.E. synagogue at Chorazin above northern end of the Sea of Galilee. (Courtesy of the Israel Government Press Office)



The Kingdom of God

God's Power Among Believers



The discoveries of Dr. Robert Lindsey, Pastor Emeritus of Jerusalem's Narkis Street Baptist Congregation, became the foundation of the Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research. His research is challenging many conclusions of New Testament scholarship from the past 150 years.

by Robert L. Lindsey

One of the greatest theological controversies in the last century concerns the meaning of the terms "Kingdom of God" and "Kingdom of Heaven." Because scholars have not given adequate attention to the fact that these are completely Hebraic terms, confusion has arisen concerning the period of time to which the Kingdom refers, who takes part in it and the exact nature of the Kingdom. Examining relevant Gospel passages in their Hebraic context will clarify what Jesus meant when he spoke of the "Kingdom of God" or the "Kingdom of Heaven."

One Kingdom or Two?

The terms "Kingdom of God" and "Kingdom of Heaven" are not found in the Hebrew Scriptures, but apparently were developed later by the Pharisees. In the Second Temple period the commandment against taking the LORD's name in vain was so strictly interpreted that people used euphemisms to avoid unintentionally misusing his name. Jesus would have followed the same practice — to do otherwise would have shocked his listeners (see "The Unutterable Name of God," JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE, February 1988).

The "Kingdom of Heaven" is the מְלִכְוּת שָׁמַיִם (*mal-KUT sha-MA-yim*) spoken of by the rabbis, and "Heaven" here is simply a synonym for "God" — much as we use it today when we exclaim "Thank Heaven!" The terms "Kingdom of God" and "Kingdom of Heaven" therefore are interchangeable. Jesus did not speak of two divine Kingdoms, but only one.

What Is This Kingdom?

An important key to understanding Jesus' use of Kingdom of God is how the rabbis used it. With the rabbis it was a spiritual term, meaning the rule of God over a person who keeps or begins to keep the written and oral commandments. This is

illustrated by a statement of Rabbi Joshua ben Korha: "Why is 'Hear, O Israel' [Dt. 6:4-9] recited before 'If, then, you obey the commandments' [Dt. 11:13-21] in the daily prayers? To indicate that one should accept first the Kingdom of Heaven, and only afterwards the yoke of the commandments" (Mishnah, Berachot 2:2).

The rabbis felt that when a person confessed "The LORD is our God, the LORD alone," indicating his intention to keep the Torah, he came under God's rule and authority and thus came into the Kingdom of God. Having accepted God's authority over him, he was able to begin keeping the commandments.

Jesus spoke of the Kingdom with the same understanding in Matthew 7:21: "Not everyone who says 'LORD, LORD' to me will come into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." The emphasis is on the importance of keeping God's commandments, but Jesus' use of "Kingdom of Heaven" is the same as Joshua ben Korha's in the passage above. Both of these sages spoke of God's Kingdom being rooted in the confession of his authority and the doing of his will.

According to Jesus' definition, this Kingdom is limited: only those who follow him are included. The Kingdom should not be confused with God's providential rule: "Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool" (Isaiah 66:1); in this general sense, the LORD is King of the Universe. Neither should it be viewed as an earthly political movement, out to rule by cross and sword or to ordain Christian leaders to govern a largely unconverted world.

Understanding what the Kingdom is should clear up confusion about the period of time to which it refers. The Kingdom of God appears whenever individuals take upon themselves the rule of God. When Matthew 7:21 is translated back into Hebrew, one recognizes its proverbial form in which there is no real future tense. The saying should be understood: "Not everyone

who says 'LORD, LORD' to me **comes** into the Kingdom of Heaven. . . ." The second part of the verse likewise reflects the idea of present time: "but he who **is doing** the will of my Father. . . ."

Matthew 6:10 makes the same point: "Your Kingdom come, your will be done in heaven and on earth." The phrases are synonymous: people come into the Kingdom when they accept God's authority and begin to do his will.

Jesus' Movement

The Kingdom of God is the movement led by Jesus. He primarily used "Kingdom of God" to describe the body of his followers among whom God was present in power. The following examples characterize the Kingdom as an expanding movement made up of Jesus' followers.

In the story of the Beelzebul controversy (Lk. 11:14-26), people in the crowd accuse Jesus of casting out evil spirits with the aid of Satan. Jesus points out that it would not be sensible to think of the demons as being divided against each other under Satan's rule. Jesus casts out demons through God's power, and thus demonstrates that the Kingdom of God has manifested itself to those who have seen what has happened: "If I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you" (vs. 20; see "By the Finger of God," JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE, July/August 1989).

When Jesus cast out an evil spirit by God's power, God took charge; he was in authority over Satan at that moment. The people who saw the miracle had not necessarily submitted to God's rule, but they saw God at work just the same.

In the story of the rich man in Matthew 19, Mark 10 and Luke 18, Jesus challenges the man to sell all he has, give it to the poor and "come, follow me." The man turns away and Jesus says, "How difficult it is for a rich man to come into the Kingdom of Heaven!" To join the movement Jesus is leading, one submits to his authority and thereby comes into the Kingdom of God.

When Peter asked what it meant that he and the other disciples had "left all" and followed Jesus, Jesus replied, "There is no one who has left home . . . for the sake of the Kingdom of God who will not receive more in this life — and in the world to come, eternal life." Being a part of the Kingdom of God was literally to follow Jesus, to take up one's cross and follow him, to join

his divine movement. It was to be a part of others who together would be blessed in the Kingdom of God in its earthly manifestation, and in the world beyond would inherit eternal life.

In the context of the parable of the two sons, Jesus says: "The tax collectors and prostitutes are coming into the Kingdom of God ahead of you, for John has come in the way of righteousness and you have not believed him, but the tax collectors and prostitutes have believed him" (Mt. 21:31-32). Jesus was speaking of individuals, tax collectors and prostitutes, becoming part of a group — the Kingdom of God.

Jesus honored John the Baptist as the last great prophet of old: "Among those born of women, no one has lived who is greater than John the Baptist" (Mt. 11:11-14). However Jesus added that "the smallest in



"The breaker will go up before them; they will burst through the gate and go out." (Micah 2:13)

the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than John.” It was possible to speak of the greatest or smallest in the Kingdom, because it is a movement made up of individuals.

In Matthew 11:12 Jesus says, “From the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of Heaven has been breaking forth. . . .” This passage is an oblique reference to Micah 2:13, where the Messiah “breaks down [the makeshift stone corral wall to let out the sheep in the morning]. They pass through the gate with their King before them and the LORD at their

The expression מְלִכּוּת שָׁמַיִם (*mal-KUT sha-MA-yim*, kingdom of heaven) appears only in rabbinic literature and the Gospels. It does not appear in the Scriptures, the literature created by the Essenes (the Dead Sea Scrolls), or in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. This is important and often overlooked by scholars.

The world of Jesus is a world in common with the rabbis, not with the Essenes or the apocalyptists. In addition to *mal-KUT sha-MA-yim*, there are many other terms that are unique to Jesus and the rabbis such as מָשָׁל (*ma-SHAL*, parable) — in the Bible *ma-SHAL* refers to a proverb and not to the entire story-parables told by Jesus and the sages of his day — and תְּשׁוּבָה (*te-shu-VAH*, repentance). *te-shu-VAH* is not found, for example, in the Scriptures, in Philo or in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The rabbis’ view was that to ensure that the observance of the *mitsvot* or commandments would not be mechanical, one should first commit oneself to the Kingdom of Heaven before beginning to observe God’s commandments. This was the view of Joshua ben Korha (Mishnah, Berachot 2:2). This committing oneself to the Kingdom of Heaven is formalized by one’s confession of the Shema, the declaration that there is but one God, but its practical expression is in the observance of the commandments. In effect, the moment a person did a good deed — that is, the will of God — at that moment he came into the Kingdom of Heaven.

There is a final redemption or completion of the Kingdom, but both Jesus and the rabbis generally viewed the Kingdom in a more practical, everyday way: doing the will of God. They would have viewed the final redemption in a fashion similar to the well-known rabbinic saying found in the Mishnah tractate Avot 2:16: “It is not your part to finish the task, yet neither are you free to desist from it.”

There is a story in rabbinic literature that helps illustrate the first-century Jewish understanding of the Kingdom of Heaven, and also supports Dr. Lindsey’s position:

A bridegroom is exempt from reciting the Shema on the first night of his marriage. . . . When Rabban Gamaliel married he recited the Shema on the first night. His disciples said to him: “Master, didn’t you teach us that a bridegroom is exempt from reciting the Shema on the first night?” “I will not listen to you,” he replied, “so as to cast off from myself the Kingdom of Heaven even for a moment.” (Mishnah, Berachot 2:5)

This commandment is not found in the Written Torah, but it is part of the Oral Torah. One was permitted, as it were, to put aside the Kingdom temporarily. Gamaliel, however, refused to forget about the Kingdom even for a few moments.

— by Shmuel Safrai

head. . . .” Jesus’ reference to the Kingdom “breaking forth” characterized the movement as a large and expanding group, of which he was the “breaker” or shepherd, the King and even the LORD.

The Kingdom Is Near

Some passages which seem to prove that Jesus referred to a future earthly kingdom should be considered in their Hebraic context. In Luke 10:8–9 we read that Jesus sent his disciples out to preach and teach, and instructed them that when they entered a village or town, they were to eat and drink in the homes that accepted them. Upon healing the sick they were to say, “The Kingdom of God has come near to you.”

In the Greek text, the phrase “has come near you” appears to be a reference to time. However, translated into Hebrew it becomes קָרְבָּה אֵלֵיכֶם (*kar-VAH ‘a-le-KEM*), and in such a context it should be understood not in the sense of time but of space. This is an idiom which connotes physical intimacy, and is even used seven times in the Hebrew Scriptures as a euphemism for sexual intercourse (Gen. 20:4; Lev. 18:6,14; 20:16; Dt. 22:14; Is. 8:3; Ezek. 18:6).

God’s rule is demonstrated when a miracle of healing occurs as much as when a demon is cast out. When the disciples exclaimed, “The Kingdom of God has come near,” they were interpreting the healing as the immediacy of God’s presence in power. In effect, the Kingdom was not near but already present. Their Hebrew declaration meant, “God has taken charge here.”

C. H. Dodd, who wrote the influential *The Parables of the Kingdom* in 1935, argued for this interpretation of the passage. Had he believed that the Gospel texts strongly reflect a Hebrew original, he might have achieved more success with his theology of “realized eschatology.” The failure of many scholars to understand Jesus’ use of the expression “Kingdom of God” or “Kingdom of Heaven” lies largely in their failure to take seriously the highly Hebraic character of a great deal of the Gospels.

Much of the material in the synoptic Gospels seems to be translated from Hebrew. We must attempt to discover the underlying Hebrew original, comparing rabbinic usage when possible. In the case of “Kingdom of God” we find that the overwhelming majority of Gospel texts uses this term to describe an expanding community of believers led by Jesus, through whom God manifested his power and blessing. JP

Your Money or Your Life

by Randall Buth

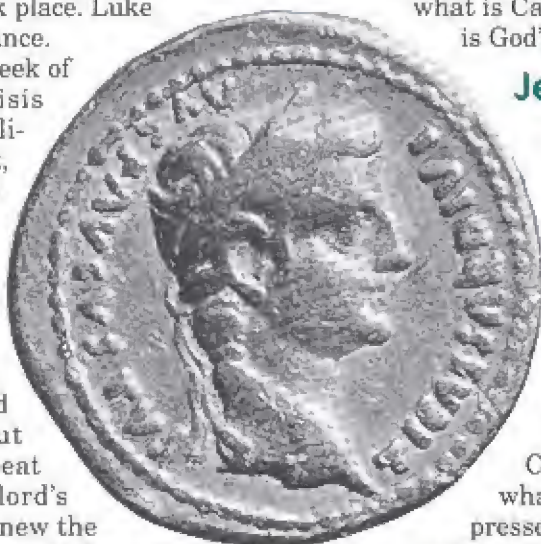
Sometimes a translation can be dramatically changed when the translator learns more about the culture in which the original events took place. Luke 20:24 is one such instance.

During the final week of Jesus' ministry, a crisis developed with the religious authorities. First, Jesus tried to stop the money lenders and the merchants from operating in the Temple. The religious authorities demanded an explanation of his actions, and he responded with a parable about wicked tenants who beat and killed their landlord's son. The authorities knew the parable was spoken against them, and they sent agents to try to catch Jesus in a word against the Roman government so that they could have him arrested and condemned.

Loaded Question

"Should we pay taxes to Caesar or not?" The question was loaded. The pious people saw the Roman government and army as a denial of God's promises to Israel, pagans who defiled the country by their presence. Many longed for the freedom they enjoyed in the days of the Maccabees, and the faithful believers expected God to send his Messiah to liberate them. No self-respecting prophet would tell the pious people that God was happy with Roman rule and that they should be content with the taxes and idolatrous practices of the Roman officials. But if Jesus said anything about a coming day when they would not pay taxes to Rome, the agents of the religious authorities would be able to testify that Jesus advocated the overthrow of Roman rule.

Jesus' answer is famous, though its impact on the immediate audience often is underestimated or misunderstood. "Give me a denarius. Whose image and inscription are on it?" "Caesar's." "Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."



Jesus' Wordplay

I once asked a translator in Africa to explain what his translation of this verse would convey to his people. He responded that the contrast was primarily between money and obligations: pay to Caesar what you owe Caesar and pay to God what you owe him. When pressed further he mentioned tithes and helping the church.

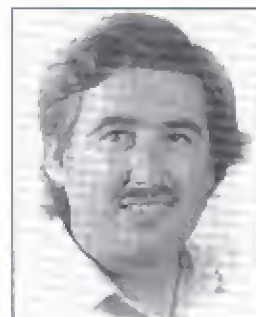
This man's answer was true as far as it went, but missed the dynamics of Jesus' wordplay.

The power of Jesus' response comes from a play on the word "image." Human beings are the image of God. Let Caesar have the things he puts his image on, but let every man give his whole life to God. After all, men are created in God's image and they owe him their lives, their time, their money, their property and their families. Such submission is the essence of repentance. Caesar and his ilk might claim a person's specific possessions, but God demands the totality of a person.

The question for the translator is whether the original audience was expected to immediately grasp Jesus' wordplay, and if so, how he can translate this wordplay for modern readers?

Rabbinic Debate

We have evidence that Jesus' contemporaries were already acquainted with reli-



Dr. Randall Buth is a translator and consultant with Wycliffe Bible Translators in Africa.

Gold denarius bearing the portrait of Tiberius, who was Roman emperor when Jesus said, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." The Latin inscription reads: "TI CAESAR DIVI AVGVSTI FILIVS AVGVSTVS" (Tiberius Caesar, son of the deified Augustus, Augustus).

(Courtesy of the Israel Museum, Jerusalem)



**Portrait bust of
Tiberius, ruler of
the Roman empire
between 14–37 A.D.**
(Courtesy of the Capitoline
Museum, Rome)

gious debate concerning “the image of God.” There is a story about Hillel, a famous rabbinic teacher who lived a generation before Jesus:

Once when Hillel concluded his lesson and began walking away his disciples asked him “Master, where are you going?”

He answered, “To do a *mitsvah* [commandment].”

They said to him, “And what is the *mitsvah* you are going to do?”

He answered, “To take a bath in the bath house.”

That’s a *mitsvah*?! ”

they exclaimed.

“Yes,” he said. “The images of kings are placed in their theaters and circuses. The one appointed to look after these images scrubs and washes them and they [the kings] pay his wages. Not only that, but he is honored like one of the nobles of the kingdom. Now we who have been created in the image and likeness of God, as it is written, ‘For in His image did God make man’ [Gen. 9:6], how much more [should we scrub and wash ourselves].” (Leviticus Rabbah 34:3)

This is a well-known story that was preserved within Jewish tradition and was probably heard by all Jewish children growing up in Jesus’ day. It is typical of rabbinic argument, short and to the point: if pagan images are worth washing, how much more are images of God worthy of washing. What is important for the translator and interpreter is not the merit of taking a bath, but the fact that a sage before the time of Jesus could make a comparison between the image of a king and man who, according to Scripture, is the image of God.

My assumption is that Leviticus Rabbah, a rabbinic text dating from about the sixth century A.D., is an historical record of sayings made prior to the time of Jesus. Whether or not this assumption is correct, the text at least indicates that at some point within Jewish culture the image of God could be used understandably in debate. The fact that Jesus was able to make the same wordplay adds to the probability that it was a known usage in his day. The Gospel story supports the pre-Christ-

tian history of the rabbinic story, while the rabbinic story supports the cultural appropriateness of the Gospel story.

Return to God

In Greek, Jesus’ answer is literally, “Then give the things of Caesar to Caesar and the things of God to God.” The things that belong to Caesar are the things that are stamped with Caesar’s image, and the things that belong to God are the things that are stamped with God’s image.

But how does one translate for people that do not have the text of Genesis or a tradition of man as God’s image? It would not be accurate to say “Give Caesar’s idol to Caesar and God’s idol to God.” The following translation often works:

“Give to Caesar what Caesar has made, and what God has made — yourselves — give to God.”

Perhaps the most impressive thing about this story is that when Jesus refers to the image metaphor he disarms his opponents and at the same time places a total demand on them. Jesus does not just evade their trap, he calls them back to God. **JP**

מְתוּרְגֵּמָן (*me-tur-ge-MAN*) is a Hebrew word that means translator, and refers specifically to the sages in rabbinic times who translated the synagogue Torah readings into Aramaic or Greek for the assembled congregation.

The modern *meturgeman* is a little different than the ancient one because he produces written rather than oral translations. However, the demands of the job and the skills required are the same: he must be fluent in the languages he is dealing with, but it is also important that he understand both his text’s originating and target cultures.

The articles in this series present insights into the Gospels that affect the translation process, and show how a knowledge of the Gospels’ Semitic background can provide a deeper understanding of Jesus’ words.

"Let Down Your Nets"

by Mendel Nun

The trammel net is the only net from ancient times that is still used commercially on the Sea of Galilee. Unlike seine fishing, trammel fishing is done at night. Also unlike the seine, the trammel is a compound net consisting of three layers held together by one corked head-rope and one leaded foot-rope. The two external layers are approximately 1.8 meters high with large mesh measuring 125 mm. from knot to knot. The middle layer is of normal mesh, about 35 to 45 mm. from knot to knot, but has more material than the outer layers and hangs loosely between them. A trammel net is always composed of at least five sections, each section being some thirty-five meters long.

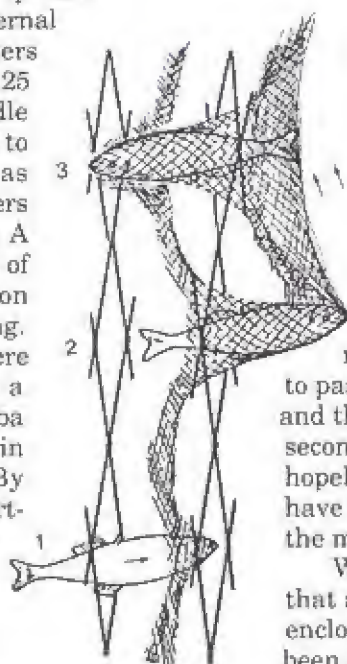
In Jesus' time fishing nets were made of linen thread, and such a net from the time of the Bar-Kochba Revolt (132–135 C.E.) was found in a cave near Ein-Gedi in 1961. By the fifth century C.E. cotton, imported from India and cultivated somewhat in the land of Israel, replaced linen and was used in these nets until it was replaced by synthetic fibers in the middle of this century.

Using the Trammel

Trammel net fishermen generally meet on the shore in the early evening, mending their nets and arranging them in the stern of the boat. Sailing or rowing to the fishing grounds, they quietly lower the net into the water so that it forms a wide curve, with the open side facing the shore. The leaded foot-rope pulls the net to the floor of the lake and the corks along the head-rope keep the net upright like a wall. Gourds, and later tin cans, were tied to the two ends of the net and served as signs in the dark, marking the position of the net.

The boat is then maneuvered into the area between the net and the shore, and the fishermen begin to make noise and turbulence by slapping the water with their oars and stamping on the bottom of the boat to

arouse the fish — a performance which often has a similar effect upon residents living along the shore. The frightened fish dive to the bottom, and in their flight toward deep water find themselves facing the net. They pass easily through the large mesh of the first layer, but immediately come to the narrow mesh of the middle layer.



By the time the fish feel the middle layer their forward momentum has already carried them through the third layer. Trying to retreat, they swing around and come back into the net. They each carry a part of the middle layer with them through the third layer.

There is enough slack in the middle layer to allow the fish to pass through the third layer and then come back through it a second time. Now the fish are hopelessly entangled in a bag they have created from the material of the middle layer of the net.

When the fishermen are sure that all the fish in the area enclosed by the trammel have been caught, the net is slowly hauled into the boat. When a fish is pulled up in the net, the hauling is momentarily stopped, the fish disentangled and the hauling resumed until at last all the fish are lying in the bottom of the boat. It is quite an art to extract the wriggling fish from the net without their escaping and without cutting one's hands. The net then is prepared for the next operation, and the boat moves on.

Usually the net is lowered and hauled up ten to fifteen times during a night, but it is also possible to leave it in the water for several hours or even for the whole night. A good night's catch may bring 50 to 100 kilograms of fish. When a trammel net is lowered in the middle of a school during the musht (St. Peter's Fish) season, hundreds of kilos may be caught. Veteran fishermen speak of memorable single catches of as much as half a ton. This is an experience



Mendel Nun was born in Latvia in 1918 and immigrated to Israel in 1939. He joined Kibbutz Ein-Gev in 1941, working for the next twenty years as a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee. He received the Ben-Zvi Prize in 1964 for his book *Ancient Jewish Fishery* [in Hebrew].

Illustration showing how a fish is enmeshed in a trammel net.

(Reproduced from The Sea of Galilee and Its Fishermen in the New Testament, p. 28.)



Throwing the cast-net, a nineteenth-century etching. (Reproduced from F. W. Farrar's The Life of Christ, London, 1874.)

that cannot be repeated today, the musht population having been greatly reduced by the extreme efficiency of modern fishing.

If the catch is large, the fish are not extracted one by one. Rather, the entire net with its fish is bundled into the boat before the fish are extracted from the net. Disentangling such a catch of fish from a trammel net can take an hour or more. When the night's work is finished, the sections of the net are separated, washed and rinsed in the lake so they will be free of silt. The process of washing a net in the morning after a night's fishing, as mentioned in Luke 5:2, is specific to the trammel net.

After the trammel net is washed and rinsed, it is hung up to dry on poles or on a wall. As the net is being hung to dry, the fishermen pull the surplus of the inner layer towards the bottom edge of the net and undo each tangle in the net. Prior to the advent of synthetic fibers, a trammel net would last one or two seasons if it was well taken care of and carefully mended. However, if the net was not dried directly after use, its linen or cotton mesh would rot in a short time.

Biblical Reference

The trammel net had an ancestor, the gill net, which consisted of one layer of fine mesh. It was set in the evening and retrieved in the morning. Fish swimming innocently in the darkness were caught in the mesh by the head, behind the gills.

The Bible refers to both these entangling nets, the trammel net and the gill net, as *מִשְׁטָּה* (*me-tsu-DAH*, snare, trap). The writer of Ecclesiastes used these nets to express his pessimistic view of the fate of mankind: "No one knows when his hour will come. Like fish that are enmeshed in a treacherous net . . . so human beings are caught at the time of calamity [i.e., death] that comes upon them without

warning" (Eccl. 9:12).

Trammel Net In the Gospels

Among ancient sources, only the Gospels preserve clear references to work with the trammel net. Mark tells us: "And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and followed him" (Mk. 1:19–20).

Matthew's version is almost identical, but he does not mention hired servants: "And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him" (Mt. 4:21–22).

I suggested in the first article in this series (September/October 1989) that Jesus began his ministry on the shore of Heptapegon near Capernaum in the winter during the musht season. The mention of "nets" in the plural points to the trammel net, which consisted of at least five separate sections. Furthermore, both Matthew and Mark note that Zebedee and his two sons were mending nets in their boat. Fishermen working their trammel nets at night mended them by day on the shore; but when work was pressing, as it often was during the musht

season, urgent mending was done in the boats. Also, in ancient times a trammel net boat, which was five to six meters long, was manned by a crew of four. A crew of fishermen of the size mentioned in these Gospel passages likely was using a trammel net boat.

The Miraculous Catch

Now that we are familiar with the trammel net, it will be easier to understand the story of the miraculous catch as told in the Gospel of Luke:

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats pulled up on the shore. The fishermen had left them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to push out a little from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Push out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch."

Simon answered, "Teacher, we have worked all night and not caught anything! However, if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they enclosed such a great school of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they were about to sink.

Because of the limited fishing grounds at Heptapegon, two crews were working in partnership that night. In order to avoid disputes over fishing rights in this choice area of the lake, fishing crews would work together and share the catch. This was exactly how fishing was organized there until the 1960s when musht fishing in that area ceased to be commercially viable.

Simon, after expressing his reservations, took his boat out to the deeper water, the nets were lowered and the catch was prodigious. In fact, the nets were so full that they began to tear as they were being hauled into the boat, and there was not room for the overflowing nets on the one boat. Simon's crew called to their partners' boat for assistance. The boat swiftly arrived and took some sections of the net on board.

Luke included Jesus' call to Simon: "When Simon Peter saw what had happened, he fell down before Jesus and said, 'Go away from me, Lord. I am a sinful man!' For he and the others with him were

The Cast-Net

The cast-net, called *קלפ* (*KE-la'*) in Hebrew, is circular, measures from six to eight meters in diameter and has lead sinkers attached to its edges. It was used by a fisherman working alone who would arrange it on his right arm and, standing in shallow water or in a boat, throw it forcefully out onto the water where it would land like a parachute and sink to the bottom. A fisherman using this net had to approach his prey silently and without casting a shadow.

There were two ways of retrieving the catch. The fisherman could dive down to the net, pull the fish out of the mesh one by one and put them into a pouch. Or he could dive and gather up the edges of the net, lifting them carefully over the stones, and pull the net with the catch to the shore or into the boat.

Like the seine, the cast-net is an ancient device. Complete cast-nets were found in Egyptian tombs dating to the second millennium B.C.E. Two kinds were used on the Sea of Galilee, one for large fish and the other for sardines. The sardine cast-net had a small mesh (10 mm. from knot to knot), was attached to cords used to retrieve it and was thrown from a boat. The net for big fish had a larger mesh (35 mm. from knot to knot for biny and 45 mm. for musht) and heavier sinkers to prevent the larger, quicker fish from escaping before the net reached the bottom.

Cast-nets have not been used in commercial fishing in the Sea of Galilee since the middle of this century. The Hebrew Scriptures do not mention the cast-net by name, though there may be a reference to it in the expression, "to cast a net over," as in Ezekiel 32:3, "Thus says the LORD God: 'I will cast my net over you. . . . You will be hauled up in my seine.'"

The cast-net (*ἀμφίβληστρον*, *amphiblestron*) is mentioned in Matthew 4:18: "As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were throwing a cast-net into the lake, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men. And immediately they left their nets and followed him'" (Mt. 4:18-20).

From the text, it might appear that the brothers had nothing to leave but their nets. But according to Luke 5:3, Simon had a boat, and Luke 4:38 and Matthew 8:14 both mention his house in Capernaum.

— Mendel Nun

awestruck at the catch of fish which they had taken. The same was true of Simon's partners, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid. From now on you will be catching men.' When they had beached their boats, they left everything and followed him" (Lk. 5:8-11). **JP**

Transliteration Key

Hebrew & Aramaic

Consonants

א — ' (silent)	ב — b	ג — g	ד — d	ה — h	ו — v	ז — z	ח — h (voiceless guttural — no English equivalent)	ט — t	י — y (or silent)	כ — k	ך* — k (like ch in the Scottish loch — no
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English equivalent)

ל — l	מ — m	נ — n	ס — s	ע — ' (voiced guttural — no English equivalent)	פ — p	ף* — f	צ — ts (like ts in nets)	ק — k	ר — r	ש — sh	ס — s	ת — t
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*This is the form of the letter when it appears at

the end of a word.

Vowels

The consonant א, a silent letter, is used above or before each vowel as a point of reference.

א — a (like a in father; rarely like the o in bone)	א, א — a (like a in father)	א, א — e (sometimes like e in net, sometimes like e in hey, and sometimes somewhere in between)	א, א — e (like e in net)	א, א — i (like i in ski)	א, א, א — o (like o in oh)	א, א — u (like u in flu)
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א — e (sometimes barely audible like e in happen-
ing, at other times as
long as e in net; also can
be silent in which case
we transliterate with
nothing)

Diphthongs

א, א — ai	א, א — oi	א, א — ui
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Greek

Greek words are transliterated according to the Society of Biblical Literature system.

Readers' Forum

(continued from page 2)

Jews in the first century know their tribal affiliation, and did it affect people's daily life in any way?

—A reader in Cleveland, Oklahoma, U.S.A.

Many Jews in the time of Jesus had preserved the tradition about which tribe they belonged to. For instance, note the inscription שלבי דוד (she-le-VE da-VID, belonging to the house of David) on the ossuary of one הלל or ללל (hi-LEL or da-LAL, the reading is not certain). The ossuary was found in a sepulcher at Giv'at Hamivtar in Jerusalem in 1971, and people were buried in this tomb for some 150 years until 70 C.E.

There are many other examples of Jews from the first century who were concerned with their tribal ancestry. Ta'anit 4:5 in the Mishnah preserves a list of the families that brought the wood offering to the Temple: "The wood offering of the priests and the people was brought nine times in the year: on the first of Nisan by the family of

Arah of the tribe of Judah; on the twentieth of Tammuz by the family of David of the tribe of Judah; on the fifth of Ab by the family of Parosh of the tribe of Judah; on the seventh of the same month by the family of Jonadab the son of Rechab; on the tenth by the family of Senaah of the tribe of Benjamin. . . ."

Rabbi Zadok, whose life spanned the destruction of the Temple, also was concerned to indicate his tribal affiliation. He is quoted as saying, "I am a descendant of the sons of Senaah the son of Benjamin" (Tosefta, Ta'anit 4:6).

Except for priests and Levites, tribal affiliation did not affect daily life, although many people considered their lineage to be significant. Lineage was especially important to those who traced their ancestry to David, since from his descendants the Messiah was to be born.

Note that the ancestry of Jesus of Nazareth is given in great detail in the New Testament, and it is emphasized that Jesus was of the house of David (Mt. 1:1, Lk. 2:4). Jesus also was sometimes addressed by the common people as "Jesus, son of David," for example in Luke 18:38-39. Because of messianic hopes, throughout Jewish history and until today a relationship to the house of David has been important.

—Shmuel Safrai

**"House of David"
ossuary inscription.**
(Courtesy of the Israel
Department of Antiquities
and Museums)



JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE welcomes the opinions of readers. Although space is limited, we will use Readers' Forum to share as many of our readers' comments and questions as possible.

A Different Perspective



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— A hungry reader in Peaceful Pardess Valley, Wales

Jerusalem School Study Tour

The Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research will host a study tour of Israel this spring, March 30–April 13, 1990.

- Daily lectures by the Jerusalem School's scholars who will be actively involved throughout.
- Unique Passover meal in Jerusalem.
- Fifteen days, thirteen nights in Israel — \$1,919 from New York, or \$2,158 from Los Angeles.

To receive more information about the tour, write or phone the Centre for the Study of Biblical Research, P.O. Box 5922, Pasadena, CA 91107 (tel. 818-796-8001).

Glossary

ben – the Hebrew word בֶּן (son), or בִּת (daughter). In the Second Temple period there were relatively few personal names, and *ben* often was used together with the father's name to distinguish males bearing the same personal name. Females with the same personal name often were distinguished by adding בִּת (bat, daughter) and the father's name.

diaspora (di-as-pə-rə) – the area outside the land of Israel settled by Jews, or the Jews who settled there.

genizah (גִּנְזָה, ge-ni-ZAH, storing) – a place for storing damaged or worn out books and ritual objects containing the name of God. According to Jewish law, such objects could not be destroyed, but were hidden so that they would not be defiled. When the *genizah* could hold no more, its contents were buried in the cemetery.

halachah (הֲלָכָה, ha-la-KAH) – the body of Jewish law, especially the legal part of

rabbinic literature. **halachic** (hä-läk'ik) – pertaining to halachah.

Maccabees (mak'ə-bēz) – nickname of the Hasmoneans, a family of Jewish priests who led a successful revolt which began in 168 B.C. against the Hellenized Selucid rulers in Syria. The Maccabees ruled the land of Israel from 142 to 63 B.C.

ossuary (äsh'ə-wer-ē) – a "bone box," a depository for the bones of the dead. According to Jewish burial practices in the land of Israel at the time of Jesus, the bones of the deceased were collected one year after an initial interment and reinterred in a small container usually carved from stone. Sometimes the bones of several members of the same family were collected and placed in the same ossuary. The average size of these boxes was 50 cm. long, 30 cm. wide and 30 cm. high. Thousands of ossuaries have been found in the vicinity of Jerusalem alone.

The Jerusalem School

The Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research (מכון ירושלים לחקר האונגליונים) is a consortium of Jewish and Christian scholars who are studying Jesus' sayings within the context of the language and culture in which he lived. Their work confirms that Jesus was a Jewish sage who taught in Hebrew and used uniquely rabbinic teaching methods.

The Jerusalem School scholars believe that the original life story of Jesus was written in Hebrew, and that it can be successfully recovered from the Greek texts of the synoptic Gospels. The School's central objective is to retrieve this first biography

of Jesus. This is an attempt to recover a lost document from the Second Temple period, a Hebrew scroll which, like so much Jewish literature of the period, has been preserved only in Greek.

As a means to its objective, the Jerusalem School is creating a detailed commentary on the synoptic Gospels which will reflect the renewed insight provided by the School's research.

The Jerusalem School was registered in Israel as a nonprofit research institute in 1985.



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Many of JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE's readers are as interested as the scholars of the Jerusalem School in the exploration of Jesus' biography. By becoming a member of the International Synoptic Society, you will be instrumental in helping us all to better understand the words of Jesus. Your membership dues will help expand the horizons of Gospel research, and enable JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE to more fully report on the work of the Jerusalem School.

